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RICHARD J WILLIAMS

CONCRETE ANTENNA

The sound installation Concrete Antenna occupies a site in Newhaven, one of the most singular and peculiar parts of Edinburgh. The broader area is the district of Newhaven, along with the adjacent Leith a separate burgh before its incorporation into Edinburgh in 1920; in common with Leith it maintains a sense of separateness from the city of which it is politically a part. But its sense of separateness – which is prized, and real, famously documented by the photographers Octavius and Hill in the 1820s – bashes up against its contemporary condition, which is by most objective architectural standards a disaster.

You can approach Newhaven various ways: most commonly perhaps along the waterfront where at the eastern edge (insofar as there is an edge) it merges imperceptibly into Leith. To the west, Newhaven becomes Granton in a long struggle with light industry, where retail sheds and lockups meet some shoddy new development. The heart of the place is the ancient harbour to which Concrete Antenna obliquely refers, and around here there is a few yards away from the traffic a sense of what the place might once of have been, a fishing port with a market square and church. Half close your eyes and you can still see it – just – but open them fully and you're in an architectural miasma, in which buildings of wildly varying functions and scales fight it out. Its heterogeneity is positively Texan: you could, at certain moments, be in Houston. To be certain, it is the complete opposite of what we understand to be Edinburgh.

Newhaven's very incomprehensibility has lately drawn artists of various kinds, attracted by the fact that it's one of few parts of Edinburgh which hasn't been prethought or prejudged. It retains the unselfconsciousness of the industrial city; a landscape of fragments, it's there to be made. And in the middle of this unmade landscape is one of Edinburgh's most remarkable architectural sites, the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop. Designed by the architects Sutherland Hussey, it was built in two phases between 2012 and 2015, occupying a mid-Newhaven site adjacent to an old rail yard. The line – lines – exist, like everything else in Newhaven in fragments, and this one has been turned into a popular cycling route. The ESW is unlike anything else in the city. It occupies a hollow between, on the one hand, the 1880s working class tenements of Hawthornvale, and on the other, a Brookside-ish nest of suburban houses built a century later and seemingly lifted from Liverpool's Brookside. In the middle it defines nothing short of a utopian space, built with a rare generosity, in which everything seems possible. 'Utopian' is a strong word but justified here because

Stand with your back to the main road and raise your eyes beyond the harbor, and the solid stone and the dignified old fishmarket buildings give way to some 'Imperceptibly' is perhaps the wrong word: it is the most disastrously heterogenous landscape imaginable, the